

Cutscores for District Performance Classifications for the State of the Schools  
Report Based on the Percentage of Students Meeting the Reading, Writing,  
Speaking, and Listening Standards

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The proposed 2001 State of the Schools Report will provide summary information for each district on how well students are performing on Nebraska's Reading, Writing (only one of the Writing Standards will be included in the 2001 District performance), Speaking, and Listening Standards at Grades 4, 8, and 11. In addition to providing ratings of the quality of the assessments used to measure student performance in the district, districts will also be rated on the percentage of students in the district meeting these standards. Five performance categories have been established: Unacceptable, Acceptable but Needs Improvement, Good, Very Good, and Exemplary.

In order to make these classification decisions it is necessary establish the cutscores for classifying districts into the 5 performance categories based on the percentage of students meeting the Standards. This report summarizes the results of a workshop conducted to determine recommended cutscores for making these district performance classification decisions. This workshop was conducted on September 17, 2001 in Lincoln, NE.

Participants

A panel of 59 Nebraska educators attended the workshop. The panel was composed of ESU representatives and teachers, selected from all geographic regions of the state. These panel members, on average, had over 20 years of experience in educational settings. The majority held advanced degrees (33 with masters degrees, 4 with doctoral degrees, one with an Education Specialist degree). Recruitment of these panel members was the responsibility of the State Department of Education. Of the 59 total panelists, 19 worked with the Grade 4 Reading/Writing Standards, 20 worked with the Grade 8 Standards, and 20 worked with the High School Standards. A list of the school districts and ESUs represented on the panel is included in the appendix.

## Procedures

The first activity was to orient the full group of 59 panel members to the project and give them an overview of the tasks they would be completing. Then the panel members engaged in a discussion of the meaning of the five performance categories that were provided by the NDE. These performance category descriptors are included in the appendix. Panelists participated in a practice activity that asked them to consider an analogous situation. This training and practice activity was important to ensure the panelists' understanding of the tasks they would perform. After the orientation and practice activities, the panels were separated into grade-specific groups for the remainder of the workshop.

The panel members considered the standards in blocks, first addressing the Reading Standards, followed in turn by the Writing, Speaking, and Listening Standards. The panel members rated all of the Writing Standards even though only the Writing Standard pertaining to notetaking was used in the calculation of the cutscores in this report. Within each block of standards, panelists first familiarized themselves with the relevant standards and discussed the nature of the standards in terms of their levels of difficulty. Then, independently, they provided their initial decisions of the cutoff values for performance categories for each of the standards within that block. They followed this same sequence of activities for the Writing, Speaking, and Listening Standards, turning in rating forms that showed their initial decisions of the percentage cutscores for the district performance categories for every standard within that section of Standards.

From their initial estimates, averages for the group for each performance category cutoff score, for each of the standards within the block of standards, was determined. These preliminary results were shared with the panelists. Individual panelists were also privately shown their average values. Next, panelists engaged in a discussion of these preliminary results. This discussion focused on the interpretation of the data and a reminder of how the cut scores would be used to classify districts' performance on meeting the standards. A second round of decisions was then obtained from the panelists. These second round values were averaged across the panelists to provide the recommended

cutscores for each of the performance levels for each of the standards within the block of standards.

To determine the overall percentage cutoff values for the combined performance of students on the Reading Standards (including all the standards for Reading, 1 standard for Writing related to notetaking, and all of the Listening and Speaking Standards for each grade level), the cutoff values for each performance level across the full set of Standards were averaged. This yielded, for each grade level, four cutoff values: 1) minimum percentage needed to be classified as Acceptable but Needs Improvement; 2) minimum percentage needed to be classified as Good, 3) minimum percentage needed to be classified as Very Good; 4) minimum percentage needed to be classified as Exemplary.

After the panelists made their Round 2 decisions, they completed an evaluation that asked them to rate a) their level of satisfaction with the orientation and training and the whether the right amount of time was devoted to these activities, b) their confidence in the values they provided for the percentage cutscores for district performance classifications and whether they felt they had sufficient time to make these decisions, and c) their overall satisfaction with the workshop and the workshop's organization. In addition, they had the opportunity to provide written comments on ways they felt the workshop could be improved.

## Results

The results for the district performance cutscores are presented for each grade level separately. Following these results is a summary of the evaluation ratings for the total group of 59 panelists.

## Grade 4 Results

Table 1 contains the Round 1 averages, for each of the Reading/Writing Standards for each of the four cutscores. When these results were aggregated (using only the Writing standard related to notetaking in the calculations), the following cutscores resulted:

Round 1 Cutscores	Mean	SD
Unacceptable/ Acceptable, Needs Improvement:	31.4	4.80
Acceptable, Needs Improvement/Good	51.3	5.60
Good/Very Good	71.4	5.90
Very Good/Exemplary	87.9	4.50

Table 2 shows the Round 2 averages for the Reading/Writing Standards for each of the four cutscores. When these results were aggregated (using only the Writing standard related to notetaking in the calculations), the following cutscores were obtained:

Round 2 Cutscores	Mean	SD
Unacceptable/ Acceptable, Needs Improvement:	31.9	4.70
Acceptable, Needs Improvement/Good	51.9	5.20
Good/Very Good	70.8	5.50
Very Good/Exemplary	85.9	4.20



## Grade 8 Results

Table 3 contains the Grade 8 Round 1 averages, for each of the Reading/Writing Standards for each of the four cutscores. When these results were aggregated (using only the 5<sup>th</sup> Writing standard in the calculations), the following cutscores resulted:

Round 1 Cutscores	Mean	SD
Unacceptable/ Acceptable, Needs Improvement:	27.3	3.20
Acceptable, Needs Improvement, Good	45.4	2.30
Good/Very Good	65.2	3.30
Very Good/Exemplary	83.6	2.60

Table 4 shows the Grade 8 Round 2 averages for the Reading/Writing Standards for each of the four cutscores. When these results were aggregated (using only the Writing standard related to notetaking in the calculations), the following cutscores were obtained:

Round 2 Cutscores	Mean	SD
Unacceptable/ Acceptable, Needs Improvement:	26.9	3.20
Acceptable, Needs Improvement/Good	45.3	2.30
Good/Very Good	65.1	3.10
Very Good/Exemplary	83.4	2.50



## High School

Table 5 contains the High School Round 1 averages, for each of the Reading/Writing Standards for each of the four cutscores. When these results were aggregated (using only the Writing standard related to notetaking in the calculations), the following cutscores resulted:

Round 1 Cutscores	Mean	SD
Unacceptable/ Acceptable, Needs Improvement:	31.4	4.70
Acceptable, Needs Improvement, Good	48.4	4.40
Good/Very Good	66.7	4.00
Very Good/Exemplary	82.3	3.30

Table 6 shows the High School Round 2 averages for the Reading/Writing Standards for each of the four cutscores. When these results were aggregated (using only Writing standard related to notetaking in the calculations), the following cutscores were obtained:

Round 2 Cutscores	Mean	SD
Unacceptable/ Acceptable, Needs Improvement:	30.5	4.80
Acceptable, Needs Improvement/Good	47.9	4.60
Good/Very Good	65.7	4.40
Very Good/Exemplary	81.2	3.70



## Summary of Round 2 Results

Table 7 shows the values that would be used if the Round 2 estimates were adopted as the criteria for making district performance classification, rounding the values to the nearest whole percentage.

Table 7 Round 2 Recommended Percentage Cutscores for District Performance Classifications

	Grade Level		
	4	8	HS
Unacceptable/ Acceptable, NI	32	27	30
Acceptable, Needs Improvement/Good	52	45	48
Good/ Very Good	71	65	66
Very Good/ Exemplary	86	83	81

## Evaluation Results

All of the panelists were asked to provide an evaluation of workshop components. When asked about the Orientation and Training, the panelists indicated a high level of success, with an overall rating of 4.57 on a 6-point scale (where 1 = Very Unsuccessful and 6 = Very Successful). Individual elements of the Orientation and Training were also viewed as highly successful by the panelists: Orientation mean = 4.67; Overview of Tasks = 4.72; Discussion of Standards = 4.33; Practice = 4.16. Panelists also indicated that about the right amount of time was devoted to the Orientation and Training activities (mean

rating was 1.89 on a scale where 1 = too little time, 2 = right amount of time, and 3 = too much time). Using a 4-point scale to indicate their level of confidence in their decisions about the percentage of students needing to pass the standards for the district performance categories, overall panel confidence was 3.40 (where 4 = Confident). Panelists felt they had ample time to make these decisions as their average response to the question about the allocation of time for this task was 3.43 (where 4 = more than enough time to complete). The overall success of the workshop was rated, on average, at 3.09 (where 4 = Very Successful and 3 = Successful). Organization was rated overall at 3.36 (where 4 = Totally Successful and 3 = Successful). Sixty-two percent of the panelists elected to provide comments on their evaluations. Many of these comments related to suggestions for improving the process and providing comments about the political environment for the reform movement in Nebraska.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that the NDE use the Round 2 averages as a starting place for their deliberations on the final values for making performance level classifications for districts in the State. Among the many factors that could be considered in making the final decisions about these cutscores is whether it is desirable to have different criteria for these categories for each of the grade levels or whether a common set of cutscores for all grade levels for these categories is more desirable. If a common set of cutscores is viewed as desirable, some

compromise in values across the grade levels would need to be determined. If it is decided to average these cutscores across the grade levels, the following common cutscores would result:

Common Cutscores for District Performance Classifications for Grades 4, 8, and High School for the Reading/Writing/Speaking/Listening Standards

Unacceptable/ Acceptable, Needs Improvement	30
Acceptable, Needs Improvement/Good	48
Good/Very Good	67
Very Good/Exemplary	83

For ease of communication, it might be desirable to adopt the following cutpoints:

Unacceptable/ Acceptable, Needs Improvement	30
Acceptable, Needs Improvement/Good	50
Good/Very Good	67
Very Good/Exemplary	85

Given the amount of variability evidenced in the final results, these values are consistent with each of the panelists' final ratings.

## Appendix

List of schools and ESUs represented by panel members

Performance category descriptors



## Schools and ESUs Represented on Panel

### Schools

Arnold Elementary School  
Auburn Public Schools  
Battle Creek High School  
Bellevue Public Schools  
Cedar Canyon School  
Chadron Middle School  
Cody-Kilgore Elementary School  
Cozad East Elementary School  
Falls City Senior High  
Falls City South Elementary  
Fremont Middle School  
Friend High School  
Glenwood Elementary School  
Gothenburg Elementary School  
Grand Island Barr Middle School  
Grand Island Northwest High School  
Hemingford High School  
Johnson Brock High School  
Kearney High School  
Lakeside Central Elementary School  
LaVista Central Elementary School  
Lexington High School  
Lincoln Northeast High School  
Logan View Public Schools  
Longfellow Elementary School  
Madison Middle School  
Morton Middle School  
Nebraska City Middle School  
Norfolk High School  
Norfolk Junior High School  
Norris Middle School  
North Platte High School  
O'Neill Elementary School  
Omaha Public Schools  
Overton Public Schools  
Palmyra Senior High School  
Pawnee City Secondary Schools  
Paxton Consolidated. Schools  
Pierce Elementary Schools

St. Paul High School  
Sterling Public Schools  
Waverly High School  
Woodside High School  
Wood River Rural High School

### ESUs

ESU #4: Auburn  
ESU #6: Milford  
ESU #10: Kearney  
ESU #13: Scottsbluff  
ESU #16: Ogallala  
ESU #18: Lincoln

Raymond Central Elementary Schools  
Robin Mickle Middle School  
Roosevelt School  
Scottsbluff High School  
Southeast Consolidated Elementary Schools

### Performance Category Descriptors

- Exemplary:** Exemplary student performance on standards means that a district has high levels of student performance on most or all of the standards. The performance on standards is consistently very strong.
- Very Good:** Very good student performance on standards means that a district has high performance of student performance on most of the standards. Student performance on standards is strong.
- Good:** Good student performance on standards means that students in the district perform well on some of the standards but not as well on others. Student performance on standards has more strengths than weaknesses.
- Acceptable but needs improvement :**  
Acceptable but needs improvement performance on standards means that the district has moderate levels of student performance on most of the standards. Student performance on standards is balanced between strengths and weaknesses.
- Unacceptable:** Unacceptable performance on standards means that students in the district perform at unacceptable levels on most of the standards. Student performance on standards is consistently weak.